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22. OCCURRENCE OF THE INDIAN BLACK TURTLE *MELANOCHELYS TRIJUGA* IN SIMBALBARA SANCTUARY, HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Indian black turtle or pond terrapin (*Melanochelys trijuga*) is one of the most common and widespread of the Indian freshwater turtles. Seven subspecies have been described, of which four are distributed within Indian limits, namely peninsular black turtle (*M. t. trijuga*), Cochin black turtle (*M.t. coronata*), Bangladesh black turtle (*M.t. indopeninsularis*) and Sri Lankan black turtle (*M.t. thermalis*). The others, namely the Burmese black turtle (*M.t. edeniana*), Parker's black turtle (*M.t. parkeri*) and Thai black turtle (*M.t. wiroti*) are distributed in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, respectively. Daniel (1983) reported *Melanochelys trijuga* to be a peninsular species (below 20° N latitudes), with a possibility of it occurring further northwards. However, more recent surveys have revealed that it is distributed as far as north-west Bihar (Valmiki Nagar, West Champaran; Moll and Vijaya 1986), Nepal (Royal Chitwan National Park; Dinerstein *et al.* 1987) and in north-eastern India (Assam and Meghalaya; Das 1990). In this paper, we report the occurrence of *Melanochelys trijuga* in Simbalbara Sanctuary, Himachal Pradesh.

Simbalbara is a 19 sq. km sanctuary which lies in the Shiwalik region (Outer Himalaya) in Sirmaur District of Himachal Pradesh. The sanctuary is covered by moist salbearing forests (Type 3C/C₂ of Champion and Seth 1968) and is the westernmost limit of sal (*Shorea robusta*) distribution in India. The valleys and low-lying reverine areas have sal forests dominated by *Shorea robusta* - *Ougeinia ougeinensis* — *Buchanania lanzan* associates, whereas, the hills have mixed forests dominated by *Anogeissus latifolia*

— *Acacia catechu* — *Boswellia serrata* associates.

On 18th April 1993, one of the authors (A.P.) collected a specimen of *Melanochelys trijuga* in the sal forest. This specimen was found about 10 m from a perennial stream at around 14:15 hours (alt. 450 m.s.l.). The turtle, a male was apparently feeding when first located in a thick layer of sal leaves. It was photographed and released. The posterior marginals were broken indicating a possible attempt of predation on this individual. The turtle excreted on being handled, the faeces showing remains of leaves, ants and crustaceans. The turtle was active and moving although the temperature was 41° C.

On 6th June 1993, the second author (T.J.) collected and photographed another live specimen of the same species. This individual was also an adult male and was located around 5 m from a stream, covered with sal leaves. The specimen had a broken marginal scale and was found c. one kilometre upstream from where the former specimen was located. Its morphometric measurements were as follows: straight carapace length: 194 mm, straight carapace width: 142 mm and shell height: 68 mm. Enquiries with locals about the frequency of its sightings, revealed that this species is common all along the edge of the river and in the forested regions with streams and pools, in Simbalbara Sanctuary.

The seven subspecies that are currently recognized, are differentiated predominantly on head coloration. Although the head was blackish in colour, no distinct characteristics for subspecific identification were observed. Moll and Vijaya (1986) had indicated that the subspecies *M.t. indopeninsularis* may be

distributed further north-west in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. Recently, Das (1991) has also recorded *M.t. indopeninsularis* from Corbett National Park (Uttar Pradesh). The specimens observed at Simbalbara Sanctuary are thus suspected to be *M.t. indopeninsularis*. Nonetheless, the presence of this species in Himachal Pradesh, northwest of its previously known range, is a record of considerable importance. We suggest that more survey and collection of specimens be made for allocation of subspecies and commenting further on their distribution.

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23. PRESENCE OF THE COMMON INDIAN BRONZEBACK SNAKE (*DENDRELAPHIS TRISTIS*) IN RAJASTHAN

The common Indian bronzeback or Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis tristis*) is a highly arboreal snake, living almost entirely on trees and shrubs. According to Daniel (1983 THE BOOK OF INDIAN REPTILES), it is distributed in peninsular India, Gangetic Plain and Himalayan foothills. It is worth noting that this snake is present in the southern part of Rajasthan State where it is locally called *Udani*, i.e., one which flies. This name is derived from the rapid movement of the snake. This snake has been seen by me many times in the dense forests of Jhadol and Ogana Forest Ranges of Udaipur (North) Forest Division. These forests are rich in plant species. The major plant species are: *Tectona grandis*, *Butea monosperma*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *W. tomentosa*, *Diospyros melanoxydon*, *D. montana* var. *cordifolia*,

Santalum album, *Saccopetalum tomentosa*, *Sterculia urens*, *Lannea coromandelica*, *Alangium salvifolium*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *A. sericea*, *Acacia catechu*, *Albizia procera*, *Dalbergia paniculata*, *Syzygium heyneanum*, *Mitragyna parvifolia*, *Aegle marmelosa*, *Limonia acidissima*, *Pongamia pinnata*, etc. The density of vegetation is high in many pockets, where crown contact stage prevails round the year even in the summer. This condition presumably facilitates movement of the tree snake from one tree to another.

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24. UNUSUAL CAUDAL SCALES OF BUFF-STRIPED KEELBACK *AMPHIESMA STOLATA* (LINNAEUS)

On 18.7.1993, I captured a 417 mm long buff-striped keelback snake, *Amphiesma stolata* (Linnaeus) from Mahipal Reserve Forest Block in southern Aravallis. Its caudal scales had an unusual arrangement pattern. The

arrangement of anal and caudal scales (from cloaca to tail end) is given below:

Anal	Paired
Caudals (1 to 4)	Paired